



Overcoming Historical Romanticism
by Marc Manley

إِنَّ الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ ، الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ رَسُولَهُ مُحَمَّدَ الَّذِي اسْتَنْقَذَنَا بِهِ مِنْ عَبَادَةِ الْأَوْثَانِ وَ
الْأَصْنَامِ . الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي يَبْدُؤُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يَعِيدُهُ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمَلُوا
الصَّالِحَاتِ بِالْقَسْطِ .

فَمَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضْلِلٌ لَّهُ ، وَمَنْ يَضْلِلُهُ فَلَا هَادِيٌ لَّهُ ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ،
وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً، النَّبِيَّ الْأَمِيَّ، عَبْدَهُ وَرَسُولَهُ، خَطَمَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ
وَأَشْرَفَ الْمَرْسُلِينَ ،
صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ وَسَلَامُهُ وَتَحْيَاتُهُ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَأَزْوَاجِهِ وَأَصْحَابِهِ وَ
أَنْصَارِهِ وَذَرِيَّاتِهِ وَسَلَمٌ . إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يَصُلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ، يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا صَلُوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمُوا تَسْلِيماً، وَبَعْدَ

Verily all praise belongs to Allah [God in the Arabic language], who sent His Messenger Muhammad, the one who salvaged us from idolatrous worship. All praise belongs to Allah, who began Creation out of nothing and then perpetuates it so that He can reward those secure faith and right actions with justice.

For the one God has chosen to guide, there is no mis-guider for him. And as for one whom God has misguided, there is no guidance. And we bear testimony that there is no god but God, Allah, One is He, with no partner, Lord of lords. We also bear witness that Muhammad, the Unlettered Prophet, is His slave and messenger, Seal of the Prophets and most noble of the Messengers.

May the prayers, peace, greetings and blessings of God be upon him as well as his family, his wives, his companions, his helpers, and his progeny. Surely God and His Angels send blessings upon the Prophet therefore O' you who believe!, send prayers and blessings upon him abundantly.

Dear respected brothers and sisters in Islam, I greet you today with the greeting of Paradise, "as-Salaamu 'alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakaatuhu".

First Khutbah - Main Points

Opening from the Qur'an:

يأيها الذين ءامنوا ادخلوا في السلم كافة ولا تتبعوا خطوات الشيطان
إنه لكم عدو مبين

"*O' you of faith!, enter into Islam completely and do not follow in the footsteps of Shaytan. He is a clear enemy of yours.*" [Q: 2: 208]

I wish to continue our conversation about the enterprise of Islam in America, specifically focusing on the first part of the verse/āyah. Many have understood the following āyah to refer to the rituals of Islam such as *wudu'*/ablution, prayer, fasting, and so forth. And indeed it does. Yet, with all cases in the Qur'ān, there is a deeper sentiment that Allah is coaching the Muslims to: one of responsible action. To enter into Islam completely means to not only follow the outward aspects of what the Prophet did, such as trimming one's nails or putting one's right shoes on first, but also following the *basīrah* or vision of the Prophet. To use a technical term: *kulliyāt*, its rough translation meaning "the big picture". Never did the Prophet allow labels to do all of his talking, and more importantly, thinking, for him. He mitigated the transition from pagan idolatry to *tawhīd*/monotheism but adhering to what was absolutely essential while also allowing room for dignity, humility and the evolutionary process that was present in all who took their *shahādah*/testimony of faith in his presence.

Presently, Muslims in many parts of the world are wrestling with a similar challenge – what's quintessential and what's incidental. And in the process of determining what must stay and what might need to be altered is the call for creative minds to chart a course that will be conducive to a healthy Muslim experience [speaking primarily about Islam here in America]. But what is arresting the development of this process? I will focus on just one issue that I have observed: history, and to be more specific a type of myopic, historical romanticism in which a few select people from certain geographic locations played imaginative roles in world history, played so well that the only hope we can have is to somehow go back to this bygone era and not simply emulate their performances but reenact them like a **Civil War theme park**. We can dress up and talk like these noble, bygone people, but we never actually look to how they thought and behaved, and whether our collective energies and imaginations should be best spent on costume or on our futures.

But we are commanded to enter into it *completely*.

This can also be seen as a call and commandment of Allah, to the Muslims, to make Islam relevant to wherever you are. I spoke of the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah last time and again, I can think of no other event in the history of the Prophet's mission that so eloquently outlines this as well as demonstrates how it gets done.

So how is Islam relevant?

يأيها الناس قد جائتكم موعظة من ربكم و شفاء لما في الصدور و هدى و رحمة للمؤمنين

"O Mankind!, surely an admonition has come to you from your Lord, as has a cure for ails the heart, a guidance and a mercy for those who profess faith." [Q: 10:57]

How often do we consider that we, as the couriers of this message, bear something of worth? We must stop seeing ourselves as empty vessels and rather those that carry the noble message of Muhammad [s] – and that within it lies guidance a cure for humanity. And yet, who will listen? Are we doing all that we can, in a conscious and responsible manner to deliver this message, or are we a detriment to the success of the mission. And if so, how long will Allah tolerate *guflah*, our woeful mismanagement of the situation and replace us with another group, who can get the job done?

وإن تتولوا يستبدل قوما غيركم ثم لا يكونوا أمثلكم

"And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people who will not be like yourselves." [Q: 47:38]

Second Khutbah - Main Points

Establishing a vibrant, coherent Muslim reality.

How to make a change?

Muslims in America are going to have to stop treating Islam in America as if it is some anomaly – a bastardization of the “real thing”. We often see that Muslims wish to **explain away** the migration Islam to America in purely socio-economic terms but this is in fact a denial of Allah’s Attributes. A very secular term indeed.

How is it then, that **in a land that had no historical link with the Muslim world** should develop an indigenous Muslim community, second only to Islam via immigration? And that these two bodies should come together, not by mutual admiration, but most certainly of a Divine Influence. Allah is moving the chess pieces on the board and yet we want to explain it away as historicities.

We can **take a page of the book of our Jewish cousins** – they were not able to do what they did here in the U.S. in Europe, namely, to establish a place where they could live out a dignified existence. Of course with them is also the example of the danger of being domesticated – of reducing Islam to a cultural practice that has no link or ties with its roots.

Parable of the Dinosaurs

What do we know about dinosaurs? Most of us think of them to be lizards – but in fact, we don’t know that they absolutely looked like lizards for the following reasons: most if not all records about dinosaurs are based off of fossilized bones [i.e., bones turned to rock/minerals]. Our conceptions are mostly based on the preconceived notions that dinosaurs were basically lizard-like, therefore, everything we do or talk or think about dinosaurs must also be lizard-like.

Likewise with Islam; we’ve been told that Islam looks like *these things*: thobes, kufis, domes on mosques, etc. Thusly, when we conjure up ideas or practices for our Islam, naturally we project these ideas on it. However, most of this is a preconception. There is nothing in the Qur'an or Sunnah that stipulates we must have domes on our mosques [and those that don't are somehow missing a very certain Muslim'ness or Islamicity]. If we are to successfully establish a *bona fide*, legitimized and justified practice of Islam in this part of the world, then **we will have to be prepared to inherit the mantle of creativity and responsibility**. To not do so will render Islam a foreign and perhaps even hostile entity that has no place in the biosphere of American life.

Part of taking on this responsibility is to see that it has indeed been handed to us and we cannot wait for anyone else to see it to its end, as the following statement of Allah says:

أَلَا تَزِرُ وَازْرَةٌ وَزْرًا أَخْرَى

“*No one can bear another's load*” [Q: 53:38-39]

حاسبوا أنفسكم قبل أن تحاسبوا
وزنوا أعمالكم قبل أن توزن عليكم

“Take account of yourselves before you are held to account. Weigh your deeds before they are weighed for you.” [at-Tirmidhi’s al-Qiyamah]

Closing du’ah:

اللهم، اجعلنا من أئمة المتقين
آمين

“O’ Allah!, make us from amongst the pious.”

Amin.